



Coast Guard Flag Voice 127

DEALING WITH DEPRESSION -- HELP IS AVAILABLE

I am a retired O-6 aviator who has had two severe periods of depression since 1994. Both required medication. As a Coast Guard Officer who handled many stressful operational missions, including searching for our own downed aircrews, I thought I could handle almost anything. Wrong, when depression arrived it was overwhelming and consuming. I could/would not do anything many days. I considered suicide often and even took my loaded 375 out of its holster while considering ending my misery. There was simply NOTHING that provided pleasure. I could not have beaten depression by myself. The doctor worked very hard to find the correct combination of medications to balance the chemicals in my brain. Results, when the proper combination of medications was found, were dramatic. I felt like living again! I feel great now, Praise the Lord.

If my story would be of benefit I would be pleased to tell anybody, because depression does cause lost time to many everyday. With depression, I simply could not function. The most difficult part for me was to admit there was a problem."

The previous testimonial is from a previous active duty Coast Guard member. It clearly illustrates how overwhelming life can be, and how even the most troubling personal situation can successfully be dealt with if proper assistance is obtained. And especially in the holiday season, we find more instances of depression and suicide than any other time of the year.

Serious depression is an important public health problem affecting more than 19 million adults in the United States. In its various forms, clinical depression can disrupt sleeping, eating, school and work activities, the ability of mothers to care for their children, and can even lead to suicide. It is estimated that 10-15 percent of all new mothers, five percent of all children and adolescents, and as many as three percent of people over 65 years of age suffer from serious depression.

Although nearly 80 percent of people with clinical depression can be treated successfully with medications, psychotherapy or a combination of the two, current evidence indicates that nearly two thirds of those afflicted do not seek help. The reasons range from an individual's failure to recognize that he or she has a serious, potentially dangerous condition to a fear of the continuing social stigma connected with mental illness.

For those members of Team Coast Guard that are dealing with depression, the good news is that there are a number of ways that you can get help. One option is to use the Coast Guard's **Employee Assistance Program (EAP).**

The Coast Guard EAP is **available to all military, civilian, non-appropriated fund employees and their family members**. It provides a **confidential** professional assessment and short-term counseling and referral service to help members with their personal, job or family problems. With a simple phone call, the EAP assesses the member's situation and provides assistance with marital and family relationships, personal relationships, parenting, problems related to their job, emotional concerns, legal problems, stress, financial management and other related problems. The EAP program is unique among the armed services, in that the Coast Guard has included its military members in the traditionally civilian-only EAP.

All contacts with the EAP are held in the strictest confidence. To maintain privacy and confidentially the Coast Guard contracts the EAP services with an outside organization to operate the EAP. **In no way does utilizing the EAP affect an employee's chances of promotion or advancement.** Civilians, service members and family members deal directly with this national network of providers. **The EAP does not reveal the user's identity to the Coast Guard.** In addition, any discussion with an EAP counselor is confidential and protected by law. There are **two exceptions to this confidentiality: 1) in cases of child abuse and specific state-enforced laws addressing family violence, where mandatory reporting requirements exist, and 2) in cases of high-risk suicidal persons, where the individual could harm themselves or others.** In these cases, the contract EAP counselor will call the Coast Guard Employee Assistance Program Coordinator (EAPC) and give them information on a "need to know" basis only, to ensure that the appropriate standard of care is followed.

To use the EAP, simply call the following toll free number and make an appointment to see an EAP counselor: 1-800-222-0364. The person answering the toll free number will request your name, phone number, and a statement about what type of assistance is needed. Next the EAP service will contact you within 24 hours and set up an appointment. A counselor will be available to meet with you within 72 hours at a location no further than 30 miles away. At the first meeting, issues of confidentiality will be discussed, so that any concerns may be addressed.

Employee Assistance Program Coordinators (EAPC), located at each Integrated Support Command and the Headquarters Support Command, work with the EAP contractor and other W-L staff members to assess and coordinate available assistance and family needs and match services to personnel. The EAPC also coordinates service for cases of rape/sexual assault, suicide prevention, critical stress management, workplace violence, victim/witness program and financial management. **Personnel can also call and visit with an EAPC to address personal, job or family problems.** To contact the office nearest you, **call 1-800-872-4957** followed by the extension listed next to these ISC locations: Alameda (252), Boston (301), Cleveland (309), Honolulu (314), Ketchikan (317), Kodiak (563), Miami (307), New Orleans (308), Portsmouth, (305), San Pedro (311), Seattle (313), St. Louis (302), and Washington, DC (932). **Discussions of problems with an EAPC are also confidential.**

Another source of help is a recently developed **online mental health and depression outreach program**, located on the TRICARE Central Region web site, "Central Region/Central Source. The

"Mental Health/Depression Outreach" feature on this site is a timely and valuable tool for individuals who may be reluctant or embarrassed to seek help until they learn more about their own problem or that of a loved one.

When the TRICARE Central Region site is accessed at <http://www.triwest.com> or <http://www.region8.tricare.osd.mil>, click on the button marked "Mental Health/ Depression Outreach." From that point, a screen will appear asking if you want to obtain information, and asking you to provide contact information. You may choose to complete this, or decline it. Once you complete or decline this option, the pages provide beneficiaries with an overview of clinical depression, its effects and treatment. It also offers links that will enable you to assess your own condition; learn more about the symptoms and dangers of the various kinds of depression; learn about the available treatment options and the ways to get care; and use additional hyperlinks to access resources online.

Clicking on the link marked "Self-Assessments" allows beneficiaries to complete self-assessment questionnaires with answers based on their feelings during the previous week. Answers from this assessment are neither recorded nor tracked and are not to be considered a diagnosis, but will give beneficiaries a general indication of a depressed state and lead them to seek care in a number of ways. Among other easily accessed pages are those titled "Postpartum Depression," "The Depressed Child," "Let's Talk About Depression" (for adolescents), and "Help for Seniors." All offer ways to recognize depression in oneself, a relative or friend and provide lists of symptoms and ways to obtain help. All information obtained from these professionals is confidential, and this mental health/depression outreach module is a good tool for people who may be uncomfortable about starting the process of seeking help face to face.

Another great source of assistance is our dedicated Chaplain Corps. Our chaplains are well skilled in dealing with a whole range of personal and family issues, such as dealing with sickness, injury, or death of family members, separation, and divorce.

In addition, members of Team Coast Guard always have the option to go to their chain of command to seek help, or to go to a Coast Guard clinic or military treatment facility to seek professional medical assistance. In either case, you will be referred to competent professional counselors to help you deal with your depression.

Depression can be overwhelming, but there is help available. If you or a loved one are facing problems, use the service and/or tools mentioned above to help work through your concerns. As the testimonial above indicates, no one, even those who have achieved senior positions, are immune from depression -- but also you can return to a happy and productive life. There are people that care for you -- please let them help you achieve that goal.

Regards, FL Ames

Flag Voice Contents

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